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Anglo Saxon, but for a student of modern literature a look is enough. To read Chaucer and Wiclif it is not essential to have Anglo Saxon forms in mind. One had much better give his time to the great writers of the last five centuries. It is desirable, however, that the English grammar that one does study should be genuinely scientific. This condition is emphatically not fulfilled by the books that are most accessible in English. One will not go far astray who limits himself to the books of Morris, Earle, and Sweet.

As a final grace to crown his various accomplishments, the teacher of literature should know how to apply his pedagogic skill to the task of selecting from the great body of English writings those portions which are most suitable as material for study by youth of the different degrees of maturity represented in our schools. He must know what are the simple pieces, good for the youngest, and what are the more exacting, good for those who are stronger. To a pupil who is in earnest to read a good book he must be ready to recommend a really good book, suitable for that special case, the reading of which shall both benefit the pupil and exalt his esteem for his adviser.

S. Thurber

MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS *

Twenty years ago the modern languages were clamoring for recognition in our school and college programmes. The plea made in their behalf was not always free from extravagance as to the results to be expected from modern language teaching, nor was it always based upon a rational theory of education. It appealed too much to the "practical" instincts of the untrained public, and its claims were often supported by a most unwise polemic against the value of the classical languages in education. In these respects the movement, although conducted with less of

*Read at the School and College Conference held at the University of Chicago, Saturday, November 18, 1893.

zealous fury, bore a close resemblance to the onslaught, made at the same time by science upon the humanities, in its endeavor to secure a place by their side. Both reforms have triumphed, and, now that the smoke of conflict has in some measure cleared away, we see that it was well that they should have triumphed; that they were rational in essential principle, and that they did not deserve to suffer defeat from the excesses of their advocates. How complete has been the triumph, in the case of the modern languages, may be illustrated by a statement made by Mr. Lowell in his address of four years ago, before the Modern Language association. "It indicates," he said, "a very remarkable, and, I think, wholesome change in our way of looking at things, that I should now be addressing a numerous society composed wholly of men engaged in teaching thoroughly and scientifically the very languages once deemed unworthy to be taught at all, except as a social accomplishment or as a commercial subsidiary. There are now, I believe, as many teachers in that single department of Harvard college as sufficed for the entire undergraduate course when I took my first degree."

Those who have followed, during recent years, the course of modern language instruction in our colleges have seen that department steadily strengthened, its scope made wider and its foundations more secure. And, to come to the special subject of these remarks, our secondary schools have shared in the general upward progress. A large proportion of our high schools now offer full four year courses in French and German, courses parallel with those offered in Latin and Greek. No greater allotment of time or attention than is given the modern languages in these schools could reasonably be asked for. But when we go behind the information provided by the course of study, and inquire into the method and the spirit of modern language instruction in our secondary schools, we shall find, I fear, that the work is not always directed by scientifically competent persons, not always done with strictly educational ends in view. It is even to be feared that we are not everywhere out of the stage illustrated by Mr. Lowell in the following passage from the address already mentioned: "In the latter half of the last century a stray Frenchman was caught now and then, and kept as long as he could endure the baiting of his pupils. After failing as a teacher

of his mother-tongue, he commonly turned dancing-master, a calling which public opinion seems to have put on the same intellectual level with the other." And it is quite certain that many of our secondary schools still linger in the stage of incomplete enlightenment which looks upon a foreign language "as a social accomplishment or as a commercial subsidiary."

The question as to whether a particular school is, in its modern language work, still in the low stage of development thus characterized may best be answered by a statement of the object which that work has in view. The average, unthinking person vaguely fancies that a modern language is studied for the purpose of using it as one uses his own language, in reading, writing, and speaking. This is, undoubtedly, the ultimate aim of the study of a foreign language, but the educator knows that this aim is, in its entirety, far beyond the reach of any secondary school. And since some division of this aim must be made the primary object of the instruction, it is very important to determine what that division should be. And here we come to that great divergence of educated from common opinion which every educator must squarely face, for the popular verdict says that students of a foreign language should learn to speak it, while the educator as emphatically asserts that they should learn to read it, and that it makes little difference whether they learn to speak it or not. It is simply amazing to me, in view of the practical unanimity of professional opinion upon this subject, that our secondary schools should be willlling, in this matter, to make to a prejudice based upon ignorance the concessions that many of them do. "We cannot throw too often or too hard in the face of the public the fact that our business is educational," says Professor Calvin Thomas, and we cannot too firmly resist the influences that would have our schools waste their energies upon the impossible task of teaching children to speak foreign languages. Admitting that the thing could be done, it would not be worth doing from the educational point of view, but anyone who reflects upon the conditions that obtain in our large schools, with their large classes, knows that it cannot be done at all. It is easy to impose upon the public with the glib chatter of boys and girls upon a few subjects in which they have been well drilled—and so we have thriving "natural methods," and "systems of practical linguis-

tics" and all the other quackeries with high-sounding titles—but a very slight professional knowledge suffices to show how superficial are the results of all these devices, how utterly they are lacking in educational quality, how far even they are from accomplishing, in any real sense, their ostensible and unimportant purpose.

Let me fortify the opinion thus expressed by quotations from some well-known educators. Professor Thomas says: "You can no more teach a person to speak a foreign language by means of class instruction given at stated intervals, than you can teach him to swim by giving courses of illustrated lectures in a seven by nine bath-room. The thing never has been done, never will be done by the natural method or by any other method; and any one who professes to be able to do it may be safely set down as a quack. * * * The simple truth is that the attainable results in this direction of teaching students in the class-room to speak a foreign language are so insignificant as to be utterly devoid of any practical value whatever, out in the world." Professor Edward S. Joynes expresses with almost equal emphasis his "conviction of the utter worthlessness" of class-room exercises in speaking. "Of course, along with the tongue, the ear must be trained to an accurate pronunciation, and to the appreciation of the beauty and rhythm of the original, for without this there is no language, much less literature. It is important, also, to be able to understand what may be added, for illustration or explanation, in the original tongue. But as for learning to speak in the college class-room, the idea is futile, and all the time devoted thereto is almost utterly wasted." Mr. C. H. Grandgent enters into a mathematical calculation which is in itself a *reductio ad absurdum* of the argument for teaching students to speak foreign languages. He estimates that the individual student will get, perhaps, some six hours of practice altogether during a three years' course. Comparing this with the thousands of hours during which a child must practise his own language in learning to speak it, Mr. Grandgent concludes "that we cannot make speaking our chief aim, and that we must accept this fact once for all, and shape our methods accordingly." As for the desirability, from any standpoint, of learning to speak a foreign language, I will quote from an address by Mr. E. H. Babbitt, who says: "It requires no higher order of

intellect, and no more exercise of the judgment, to speak French or German, than to play the banjo.* * * I am accustomed also to say that both are, for the average American citizen, of about equal importance; but this is only a jocular overstatement of a nevertheless very serious fact."

These quotations might be multiplied indefinitely, and they express the opinion held, with a close approach to unanimity, by the scientific teachers of modern languages in this country. It would be safe to say that they express the opinion of nine-tenths of the members of the Modern Language association. But since this is the case, it may be urged, why take the trouble to state it at such length? Why set up for attack an object which is so evidently a man of straw? For the simple reason that scientific opinion upon the subject has not yet filtered into the popular consciousness; that it has hardly succeeded as yet in directing the work of the secondary schools, controlled as those schools still to a considerable extent are by men who are excellent in the management of business affairs, but far from competent to decide upon strictly educational questions. The pressure that comes from socially ambitious mammas and commercially ambitious papas, desirous that their children shall learn to speak French or German, makes itself felt at many points, and not a few teachers, knowing well enough from experience the hopelessness of the attempt, but yielding to the current delusion, pretend to instruct classes of fifty or sixty in the spoken language, neglecting, in consequence, the real aim towards which their efforts should be bent.

What that aim is need hardly be stated in express terms to an audience like that which I have the honor to address. To open a great literature for the student, to place in his hands a necessary tool of the highest value, to enlighten him concerning the structure of his own language and to give it greater freedom and flexibility within his grasp—these are surely objects beside which the ability to prattle a few commonplace phrases in a strange tongue seems petty indeed. And these objects are within our reach. A year or two of French, two or three years of German, and the drudgery is over, the stage of pleasurable or profitable employment of the newly-acquired language is reached. How are we to put these preliminary years to their best uses? I would

premise at this point that those uses are substantially identical, whether our students are to continue their work at the university or not. In the former case, the student will at the same time strengthen the philological foundations of his knowledge and use it as a means of research in other directions; in the latter, he will remain content with what elementary philology he has, and secure in one of the most valuable intellectual possessions that a man may claim—one of the few acquirements which, if a man deserve to have them at all, may be retained almost without further effort, certainly without effort of other than a pleasurable and stimulating sort. When the formal results of training in mathematics, in science, and in history, have gone the way of most things learned in the schools, leaving only their educational impress upon the mental structure, the foreign language is retained as a tangible possession, in addition to the intangible power that has come from the labor of accomplishing its mastery.

Passing now to one or two specific points in modern language instruction, I would insist with all the emphasis at my command upon a careful training in pronunciation. Only a superficial view will regard such insistence as paradoxical because coupled, as in this paper, with an almost contemptuous rejection of the opinion that it is educationally important to learn a language for the sake of speaking it. The words of Professor Joynes, already quoted, cover this ground so completely as to leave nothing more to be said. "The ear must be trained to an accurate pronunciation, and to the appreciation of the beauty and rhythm of the original, for without this there is no language, much less literature." I doubt if we are now anywhere as badly off as in the English schools of which Mr. D'Arcy Thompson wrote a generation ago, *a propos* of the current pronunciation of Latin: "I freely acknowledge that the heads of our greatest English schools are boldly self-consistent. They unflinchingly extend their system to modern languages; and I could name more than one flourishing and aristocratic school, where French is taught by an English clergyman with an accent that would set a Parisian *coiffeur* in convulsions; where every *u* is sounded like the *u* in *flute*, and every final *n* is clenched with an honest, Teuton guttural." But we still have schools, and many of them, in which faulty pronunciation is tolerated, and slovenly habits permitted to be formed. Whether it be from defective

hearing, or from lack of the persistent attention which the matter requires, neglect of this prime essential is only too common, and to the student is thereby done a wrong wellnigh irremediable. For it is a far more difficult task to convert a bad pronunciation into a good one than to fix a good one upon a fresh mind. I suppose there is no work that a teacher is ever called upon to do that is so wearisome, so great a tax upon the patience, as the work of teaching pronunciation during the first months. There is only one safe rule to follow—never, under any stress of other things unaccomplished, *never* permit a mispronounced syllable to pass uncorrected, and that in no vicarious fashion, but by the student himself. It will be slow work, and it will take most of the time for a while; but it is worth doing, and it is done once for all. Pronunciation is the one thing that a student can only get from his teacher—he can get everything else by himself, if need be, from books—and so in this matter the responsibility of the teacher is undivided.

Recent years have done much to obscure the hard and fast line that was formerly drawn, in the study of both ancient and modern languages, between the period devoted to formal grammar and the period devoted to the reading of texts. We begin to read at a much earlier date than we once did, and the change is for the better. Without going to the length of some of the “inductive” systems, and beginning with a text at the very start, I am inclined to think a term, or even less, sufficient for the preliminary study of the forms, and that after this, to quote from Professor Joynes once more, “the further accretion of grammatical knowledge should be made to crystallize gradually around easy, interesting, and pleasurable reading.” But there is, after all, a considerable economy in doing the paradigms and the elementary syntax in a lump, and we must be careful how we sacrifice to that fetich of making things agreeable which threatens to play such havoc with elementary education. Education is not amusement, but discipline; we may coat the pill, but must not make it of sugar throughout. Exercises in composition, except for the purpose of fixing the forms, are not desirable in the earlier years; possibly not in the secondary schools at all. And for this very purpose of fixing the forms, a dictation is often quite as useful as composition, besides having the advantage of training the ear at the same time.

Although emancipation from the necessity of translation is the final aim of all modern language study, yet scrupulous attention to translation is necessary in the earlier stages of the work. During the first year or two, every exercise should be as much a contribution to the study of the native as it is to the study of the foreign language. Idiom alone can translate idiom, and, while a literal version may be momentarily taken for a make-shift, no teacher worthy of the name will rest content with the bald rendering first suggested by the halting mental process of the beginner. The idea must be relentlessly tracked to its lair, and must receive its final expression in English as idiomatic as the original. I should hardly blame teachers, as Professor de Sumichrast does, for yie ding to "the silly request to know what it means literally," for literal translations of idioms are often highly instructive; but I should blame them for abandoning the analysis, if it be entered into at all, before the psychological process has been completely traced, and its substantial identity in the two languages distinctly shown. Again, those who remain satisfied with imperfect literal renderings are placing the greatest of all possible obstacles in the way that leads to the final goal of language study. When a student is ready to abandon the conscious formulation of English equivalents for what he is reading in French or German, he will find it far easier to slip from these outworn moorings, if he have already accustomed himself to translate thought by thought rather than word by word. If he has clung to the latter method he will find, when the critical period approaches, that the English words he no longer needs are still persistently intrusive upon his consciousness, just as one who has learned singing by *sol-fa* methods can never quite free himself from that ghostly train of syllables which the notes once meant.

My final word is about reading. In the first place, there should be a great deal of it. Begun slowly, it should be continued at a steadily increasing rate; and it is well to supplement the pages prepared for the day's lesson by a rapid translation of further pages, the students following, text in hand. After a while, reading of the original may be substituted for this sight translation, putting only the more difficult passages into English. At the same time, students should be encouraged to do outside reading, and even told that for this work they are not morally bound to

look up every word in the dictionary. If any one who has learned to read a foreign language will interrogate his consciousness, he will find his vocabulary to contain many words that were never learned all at once, words standing for concepts built up by the true organic process, with connotations towards which neither teacher nor lexicon ever contributed. In the second place, reading should be interesting. To the beginner, a bright modern story is a delight, when "Télémaque" or "Nathan der Weise" would be an affliction. We shall come to the classics in due time, but they are out of place when the student still stumbles over simple constructions. Before the course is completed, however, it should be made to include many examples of the best literature, and only good literature should be read at any time. The old-fashioned reader, with its fragmentary exhibit of diverse styles, has fortunately been banished from all enlightened schools. In the third place, the teacher should be absolutely free to choose his texts. No two classes are alike in their needs, and no one but the teacher can possibly know what it is best to read in any given case. Even if there be an adequate reason, which is doubtful, for imposing upon him, by external authority, manuals for class-room instruction, there can be none for prescribing the modern language texts that he shall use. It is the very worst of all bad educational ideals that regards the mechanical uniformity of a system as a mark of excellence. The principle of *Lehrfreiheit* has a meaning for the lower, no less than for the higher, schools. And for all schools alike it means that the best educational results are to be obtained by giving to the teacher the widest possible freedom, by leaving to his individuality the most unfettered possible play, by reducing the influence of systems and methods to the lowest possible minimum.

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